

**U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION MARGARET SPELLINGS REMARKS
UNESCO GENERAL CONFERENCE MINISTERIAL ROUNDTABLE –
EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
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I would like to thank Director General Matsuura, Chairman of the Ministerial Roundtable, for inviting me to participate in this discussion and for choosing such an important topic.

My colleagues from around the world: the central component of expanding opportunity and prosperity in the world is improving education for all. Experience continues to show that there is nothing like education to grow the potential of individuals as well as nations. And there is nothing more important to determining whether our younger generations will rise up and live in the embrace of opportunity, hope, and happiness.

Development strategies necessarily vary from place to place, achieve different results in urban versus rural areas, or in one culture versus another. But a qualified, dedicated teacher makes a difference everywhere. A curriculum that emphasizes literacy as the foundation of learning achieves results everywhere. A focus on academic rigor and learning in math and science inspires innovation and entrepreneurship everywhere. And an approach to education that emphasizes outcomes, accountability, and smart investment of resources will deliver results everywhere.

President Bush and I believe that every individual deserves a quality education. Not only in order to meet their economic potential, but also in order to participate fully in society, understand their rights and responsibilities, and engage in civic processes and institutions.

We also know that literacy is the foundation of all other learning. There are around 771 million adults around the globe who lack basic literacy skills. They are cut off from opportunities to help their families and take full advantage of a smaller, more globalized world.

With literacy, comes empowerment. Including power to do something as simple as read the instructions on a bottle of medicine or to do something as profound as read a ballot and register one's vote. These are life-saving and life-changing skills.

Our First Lady Mrs. Laura Bush has worked tirelessly to shine a spotlight on global illiteracy and to promote international cooperation to improve literacy. Her White House Conference on Global Literacy brought 39 Ministers of Education, including many who are here today, 30 First Ladies, and other experts together to discuss the way forward. UNESCO has also focused on this urgent priority. UNESCO's Regional Literacy Conferences are building upon the work begun at the White House Conference to promote successful regional strategies.

UNESCO's Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programs, or LAMP, are doing good work to acquire better data about global literacy. We can't prescribe the right solutions if we don't fully understand the problem.

Tackling the literacy challenge head-on will yield better results in other areas of education and have a positive impact on development and economic growth.

The Chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve, Ben Bernanke, recently discussed this inextricable link between education and earning power. He said, "the increase over time in the returns to education and skill is likely the single greatest cause of the long-term rise in economic inequality."

In the U.S., I hear from business leaders on almost a daily basis who are concerned that our schools are not producing a sufficient number of skilled workers to meet the rising demand. As primary consumers of the talent our schools produce, the business community has also become one of our most valuable partners.

For example, the U.S. business community played a major supporting role in the passage of our landmark law, known as No Child Left Behind, passed in 2001, and they have maintained an active role since. We've listened to their concerns and are working to strengthen math and science education, better align curricula with workforce expectations, and increase academic rigor so that our students are better prepared for college and beyond.

Improving the way we deliver education not only cultivates better workforce talent – it also has a direct and positive impact on productivity. The skills and knowledge that are acquired in classrooms and the innovations and research that emerge from campuses all serve to make business more efficient. Productivity gains, in turn, help raise overall standards of living for everyone.

In order for education to fuel economic growth and prepare our young people for a competitive world, we need to start thinking differently about how it is delivered. No matter how much we invest, resources are finite. That's a fact. So, what matters is that we get the most out of every dollar invested.

That means we need to gather good data about learning outcomes, and always emphasize accountability and transparency in our approach. These are strategies we're working hard to implement right now in public education in the United States – through the No Child Left Behind Act.

We're transitioning from a time when we invested heavily in education and just hoped for the best, to a new era in which we focus our resources on research-based strategies and demand that schools are accountable for every child. In this way, we're shining a bright light on underserved student populations – those who were once left behind, like minority and low-income children.

We have set a big goal of having all U.S. students on grade level by 2014. If we expect to achieve this goal, and if UNESCO expects to achieve the Education For All goal of ensuring universal primary education for all children by 2015, we cannot continue to conduct business as usual. We must question the way we deliver education – and rethink all our longstanding habits and assumptions.

Partnerships can go a long way towards injecting innovation and fresh thinking into the education process. Just as the U.S. is benefiting from partnerships with the business community, we're also gaining a great deal from partnerships with education institutions around the world.

I was recently in South America with a delegation of U.S. college and university presidents to promote academic exchanges. I'm a strong believer in the power of international education to cultivate ties between nations, introduce new ideas and perspectives on our campuses, and encourage collaboration on pressing challenges – from energy and the environment to hunger and disease.

While in Chile and Brazil, we highlighted many of the partnerships between our colleges, universities, and governments that facilitate and help fund academic exchanges. One of these is the U.S. State Department's new Community College Initiative.

Community colleges are something of an American invention – they combine elements of traditional universities with practical, vocational training. Through this initiative, students from countries such as Brazil, Egypt, and Turkey study at U.S. community colleges, receive English language training, and learn applied skills that will enable them to contribute to their nations' development when they return home.

Yesterday, I met with colleagues from Nordic nations, who represent some of the best education systems in the world, and they also understand the importance of extending vocational and technical training. Through programs like the U.S.-Denmark Vocational Partnership, community colleges from my country collaborate with Danish counterparts in this vital area.

Such a spirit of partnership and cooperation can stimulate growth and increase prosperity around the globe. By sharing our experiences in improving education and putting our insights into action, we can give students everywhere a chance to reach their potential and contribute to a better world.

We may not always be able to predict what tomorrow's pressing global challenges will be, but we can always rest assured that education will supply our citizens with the knowledge, skills, and creativity to address the problems we encounter and face the future with confidence.